

***Demigods and Diversity: A Critical Analysis of Diversity and Representation
in the Books of Rick Riordan***

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Shelby Ward

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Laurie Lindberg

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2017

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2017

Abstract

In modern media, diversity is an ever-present topic. Although this conversation is usually centered around major films, television, and advertisements, the world of literature also struggles to represent the diversity of the human population. Juvenile fantasy author Rick Riordan has evolved in this area over the past twelve years while writing five different series of books that highlight an array of characters of many different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. Through an analysis of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005-2009), *The Kane Chronicles* (2010-2012), *The Heroes of Olympus* (2010-2014), *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* (2015), and *The Trials of Apollo* (2016), I will evaluate the diversity and representation of minorities in Riordan's work, and discuss the impacts and outcomes of his work on current culture.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank Dr. Lindberg for her continuous support and encouragement during this process. Without her keen editing eye and insightful comments, this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Mom, Chile, Mikaela, Sam, Kathy, and Olivia for always allowing me to bounce ideas off of them and for just listening. I have remained of sound mind, mostly, because of your love and guidance. Lastly, I would like to thank Rick Riordan for creating a world that has drawn in and represented so many. There would be no thesis without your humorous and vibrant writing, so thank you for providing me a such a interesting topic.

SPC 11
Undergrad
Thesis
LD
2489
.24
2017
W37

Process Analysis

Throughout most of my life, I have been avid reader, consuming almost any type of story that was offered to me. But, out of all the stories and adventures that I loved throughout my many years of reading, none have stood out more than those written by Rick Riordan. After finishing the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series, I immediately wanted more, and became an avid fan of Riordan. After reading Riordan's recent series, even though I have grown out of the target age-range, I saw that there was more to Riordan's work than meets the eye. While reading *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*, I fell in love with the character of Alex Fierro, as she represented the population of transgender and genderfluid peoples, a group that does not usually garner much representation in any form of media, let alone literature. My enthusiasm for this character in particular was boundless as I began telling many of my close friends about the groundbreaking character Riordan had created and how revolutionary this kind of representation was in young adult literature. After reviewing Riordan's mythology series (the series that all take place in a universe where mythological creatures and gods still roam the planet), I realized that the development of diversity in his series evolved drastically from one series to the next. I thought that tracking this evolution through a research thesis would highlight Riordan's efforts to create important characters and also allow others to understand the importance of representation in all forms of media, not just film and television.

Since I had already read all of Riordan's books, I began my research by creating criteria on which I would evaluate each individual character throughout the five mythology series. I decided to track characters based on their status as main or secondary characters (or whether or not we were able to see from their perspective at all within their particular series), their race or ethnicity, their gender identity, and their sexual orientation. I also looked at any specific traits or

characteristics that made them different from other characters in the Riordan universe or similar fantasy series. This specific category, after the full evaluation of characters, highlighted ability, lifestyle, and notable moments of subverting gender stereotypes. I then created a list of characters that were important to their particular series, or who I already knew added to the diversity of the series.

Diversity, in terms of media analysis, focuses on the variety of people represented in a group. This means that the physical makeup of the group differs from the cultural norm of being white, cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned to your biological sex), and heterosexual. This does not mean that all characters in a specific group differ from this norm, but, in order to be considered diverse, there must be representation from various different races and ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations. When evaluating according to representation then, I focus on whether or not the character created is a positive representative of the minority that they are a part of. For instance, if a Latino character is introduced, that adds to the diverse makeup of a set of characters, but if this particular Latino character follows many stereotypes that we see in current culture (being a gangster or drug dealer, very masculine, or an illegal immigrant) then the culture that character is from is not being represented well.

After identifying all of these criteria and what I was specifically looking for when it came to evaluating diversity and representation, I began to move through the five series, character by character, and look at what made each character diverse or different from the normal characters we see in traditional media. This meant looking at both the accomplishments of Riordan in this area, as well as characters that he created that missed the mark. I chose to do this evaluation by series and character because this was the easiest way to see the evolution of diversity throughout Riordan's work. Also, looking at individual characters, I could highlight certain characteristics

that are less obvious for some characters which made them different from other characters we traditionally see in the fantasy genre.

Throughout this thesis, I was able to utilize skills that I have developed analyzing visual media, like film and television, and apply those skills to a different and important medium of entertainment. Throughout this process, I learned that the more diverse a cast of characters, the more accessible the story is for a wider audience. If audiences see themselves represented in a cast, they are more likely to enjoy that specific item. This connection makes the film, television show, or, in this case, novel a more personal experience and allows them to feel that they are important to our society and culture. I thoroughly enjoyed this research. Specifically, I enjoyed being able to highlight one of my favorite authors and the accomplishments he has achieved in an area that grows more important each day. Riordan has been influential in my life, and I know he stands to influence many other young people through his ongoing stories. The diversity in these books makes them culturally relevant, and I believe my thesis highlights this relevance in a time when this kind of diversity and representation is desperately needed.

Introduction

The topic of diversity in media is constant in twenty-first century media. From social media outcries of #OscarsSoWhite to the consistent whitewashing of Asian characters in recent films such as *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and *Doctor Strange* (2016), the film and television industry is constantly struggling with the process of increasing the number of characters in a socially responsible way. And while we do hear outrage against films and television shows that do not do this well, or praise for those who succeed, we do not often hear about the struggles and achievements of writers of fiction. When it comes to the written word, it is difficult to gauge diversity as this medium does not have a visual aspect as strong as that of a movie or television series. Therefore, talking about the diversity of characters within books has taken a backseat.

When reading a novel of any genre, the readers are asked to identify with the main character or sets of characters presented to them. The author challenges the audience to see through the eyes of the character that is created, and pushes them to feel and think like the character would. This is also true for the world of movies, television, and even music, as each of these art forms invites us to live a life, or a moment in life, that is not our own. Authors know they have succeeded when their audience is able to become fully immersed in the worlds, characters, and moments they have created, and when the audience is able to develop a bond with their creation.

But often the audience is asked to relate to the same kinds of characters, ones that are Caucasian, heterosexual and cisgender, or those who identify with the sex that they are biologically born as. In novels, characters have these familiar traits because this is what readers and writers are traditionally used to seeing. Normal is defined by what we most see in our mainstream media, and this definition of normal is also assumed of fictional characters even

though often no actual visual representation of the characters is given. Unless a reader is told otherwise, they assume that the characters follow the white and straight norms that are more often portrayed to the mass audience. Therefore, authors who want to create a fictional world that reflects the diversity of the real world today must consciously include characters that defy this assumed normality. Authors who wish to present a story of a character who does not follow the traditional aspects of a character, they must directly state that the character is different.

One author has truly evolved in the area of diversity by portraying multiple different characters that do not follow the assumed traits of Caucasian, straight, and cis gender. Juvenile fantasy and young adult fantasy author Rick Riordan has evolved over the past twelve years while writing five different series of books that highlight an array of characters of many different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and gender identities. Riordan, originally a middle school teacher from Texas, is now a highly successful author, writing over twenty different novels based in world where mythological creatures and gods of ancient cultures are real and have powerful children who are living among us. His stories have been popular since their debut in 2005, and have also demonstrated a definite evolution in the kind of characters he uses to populate his fantasy worlds.

Riordan's stories struck a chord with me as a young reader. I was fascinated by the tales he created by weaving ancient mythologies with contemporary culture. His stories contain peril, suspense, humor, and a troupe of complex, interesting characters who are flawed yet truly shine as heroes on the page. I have read all of his stories as they have been released over the past twelve years, and recently noticed that the types of characters he was creating were vastly different from the other characters I was meeting. His characters were not only interesting, but also remarkably diverse. The representation of vastly different types of people in a setting that

combines both mythology and the real world makes Riordan's books feel more real, and allows anyone to relate to at least one character in this mythology driven landscape.

To capture fully the evolution of characters in Riordan's work, I will analyze the vital characters found in each of the mythology series written by Riordan based on their race or ethnicity, their gender identity, and their sexual orientation, as well as other key traits that make the characters diverse or intriguing from a representation perspective. I will use the characters' descriptions and their portrayals throughout the novels to track the evolution Riordan has made in increasing diversity since the introduction of the mythology novels. The series I will use in this evaluation are *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005-2009), *The Kane Chronicles* (2010-2012), *The Heroes of Olympus* (2010-2014), *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* (2015), and *The Trials of Apollo* (2016). Two of these series, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* and *The Trials of Apollo*, are still in progress, but have presented enough characters to be included in this evaluation.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians

In 2005, Rick Riordan introduced to the world Percy Jackson, a twelve-year-old whose mother is a mortal woman and whose father is the ancient Greek god of the sea, Poseidon, making Percy a modern-day demigod. The first installment of Percy's story begins with Percy telling readers to "close this book right now", as his tales were far too dangerous for any person to read (Riordan, 2005, p. 1). He tells his audience that the world is dangerous for a demigod and that no one should wish for this fate. Jackson's advice was fortunately not taken, as the novel *The Lightning Thief*, the first book in what would soon turn into a saga of mythology-based tales,

quickly became a *New York Times* Best Seller. Readers were fascinated by Riordan's adventures featuring gods, monsters, and magic adapted directly from Greek mythology.

Percy Jackson is the main character of the five books that comprise the entire series. Percy is described very little in the beginning in the series, as he is the narrator. The clues we get to his appearance are from his mother, Sally, in a moment they share together where she states that Percy has the same black hair and green eyes as his father, who is unknown at that time (Riordan, 2005, p. 38). He is assumed caucasian by this description, as it is never specified otherwise in this, or any other description we have of Percy in further novels. We also assume he is a cisgendered male due to the use of pronouns used by other characters. But not all of Percy's physical traits are those of a traditional male lead. Early on in Percy's opening, he tells us that he has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and dyslexia (p. 7). These conditions are something that numerous middle-grade students struggle with on a daily basis, and, as we discover later on, are key traits of many demigods (p. 88). Author Riordan has a personal attachment to Percy that he discusses in many interviews: Haley, Riordan's son, was struggling with these same ailments. Riordan used to tell him stories of Percy Jackson the demigod in order for his son to feel that his struggles were shared, and even a sign that he was strong, like his demigod hero (Riordan, 2017). Consequently, Riordan gave these traits to the demigods to make his son feel more comfortable with these parts of himself, and, in the long run, also allowed other middle-grade students to connect to these characteristics themselves. This is the first instance we see of Riordan using his characters to make readers feel like they are represented.

Percy is a recurring character in almost all Riordan's series, and has become one of the pinnacle characters in the Riordan mythology universe. He is often witty and sarcastic, which seems to follow the rebellious child trope, but Riordan makes a conscious effort to prove that

Jackson, although he has been kicked out of several different schools and is constantly causing trouble (p. 2), is truly a kind hearted kid who means well. He has many positive traits that develop over the series of books. Over the course of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, we see Percy develop into a strong and important leader at Camp Half-Blood, the summer camp that is home to Greek demigods, who also is fiercely loyal to his friends. Although Percy has his flaws, he is deemed a true hero, and even offered a place as an immortal in the end of the series (2009, p. 351). Ultimately, he turns this position down to stay with his friends, but uses the opportunity to convince the Greek gods to better serve their demigod children (p. 352-354). Percy may not be physically diverse, but he allows Riordan to portray someone who may be overlooked by society, a troubled middle school boy, as a hero and leader. Percy is a character I will revisit, as he is a character that is present throughout three of the five mythology series, although his character does not change much throughout the stories.

Annabeth Chase is the main female character in the *Percy Jackson* series. She is described by Percy in the first book as a “stereotypical California girl” (2005, p. 63). She is tan, with curly blonde hair, and has striking grey eyes which Percy states are “pretty, but intimidating” (2005, p. 64). This description also describes Annabeth as a character quite accurately. Throughout this first series where she is a main character, Riordan writes Annabeth as a strong, and intimidating character that is often blunt, and not to be taken lightly. She is also considered the brains of the outfit, being born of the goddess of wisdom, Athena (p. 87), and is fiercely independent. Although she again follows the white, cisgender, and straight norm, she is not a traditional feminine heroine. Riordan seems to purposefully subvert the expectation of a “California girl” from the very moment of Annabeth’s introduction. She does not immediately fall for Percy. Annabeth is a young woman who wants to prove that she is more than her age and

her gender. The first moment where Annabeth defines herself as a strong female is within the first few pages of her introduction where Percy assumes that her father must be a Greek god. She immediately retorts back stating that assuming that a mortal woman must fall for a male god is sexist (2005, p. 97). In *The Lightning Thief*, we see Annabeth hungry to use her skills, longing for a quest and hoping to prove she is more than a “Princess”, as she is called by several other demigods at the camp (p. 89). She has her fears, of course, spiders being the primary one that often comes back to haunt her, but her intelligence is the trait that is praised most throughout the series.

It is refreshing to see a female character who is so strong and intelligent in a fantasy series that features a male lead. She is akin to the fan-favorite Hermione Granger from the *Harry Potter* series of novels. Both the women are intelligent and have no interest in being just a love interest or sidekick. Annabeth is a character that could have been easily overlooked due to her gender and taken a backseat from the action, but Riordan uses her as the perfect compliment to Percy in many ways, as she is the planning and logical mind that foils Percy’s act-first-think-later battle tactics.

Throughout the first series, Annabeth does not immediately take on the role of love interest, which is a refreshing take on a female protagonist. In the first two novels, Annabeth and Percy’s relationship is purely that of quest mates, and eventually best friends. Their development throughout the series always feels natural, as they do eventually become more than friends. This development begins to come to fruition in the end of the third book in the series, *The Titan’s Curse*, and then picks up in the fourth book when a kiss is shared between the two (2008, p. 208), ultimately ending in the fifth book where we see them begin a relationship with “the best underwater kiss of all time” (2009, p. 374). From this point on, Percy’s love life begins to come

forward in the series, and is complicated many a time, whether it be a stay with the goddess Calypso, who will be revisited later, or the introduction of a mortal girl with the ability to recognize and understand the demigod lifestyle, Rachel Elizabeth Dare. Riordan creates what seems to be a traditional love triangle trope as the series progresses, which is troubling at times because this often pits woman against woman. It is understandable that the love life of a young demigod hero cannot be easy, but since the story comes from Percy's male point of view, it can be difficult to portray women in a complex manner.

One troubling situation takes place in the third book, as Percy berates Annabeth for almost joining a group of all female warriors under the tutelage of the maiden goddess Artemis. The Hunters are not allowed to have the company of men, which also includes fighting alongside them. In the third novel, the Hunters play a major role in the quest to rescue Annabeth from the Titan lord Atlas. Percy discovers that Annabeth, before she was captured by the Titan, was considering joining the group. Percy is wholly upset by the whole situation, as he thinks Annabeth is going to leave him. The goddess Aphrodite, patron goddess of love and relationships, comes to him stating that "the Hunters are your enemies" (2007, p.186). In this moment the goddess seems to be manipulating Percy in order to produce a tragic love story, as is her goal in most of the first series, but Percy truly takes this to heart and is consistently angry at the Hunters during their quest. This moment of pitting a group of strong female warriors against our male protagonist does not stand well in an evaluation of gender, as this falls in a trope that all strong, independent women seem to hate men. Percy does come to appreciate the group of women as they are valuable on the quest to save Annabeth, but also because his close friend Thalia eventually takes on the role of leader in this group.

The other character that comprises the main three heroes in the series is Grover Underwood, Percy's best friend and a satyr, which is a mythological combination of a human and a goat. Grover is initially disguised as a human teenager in *The Lightning Thief*, as he is actually sent to watch over and guard Percy until it is the right time for him to join Camp Half-Blood. Grover was described as an "easy target" (2005, p. 3) when he was still known to Percy as his mortal best friend. Grover is scrawny, cries often, has a large spread of acne and a hint of facial hair, and is shrouded by a large puff of brown, curly hair, which we discover later is used to hide his horns. Grover, when feigning humanness, also uses crutches to hide the fact he walks with goat legs. Percy uses "crippled" to describe Grover's state, and states that Grover looks like "every step causes him pain" (p. 3). We assume again that Grover is white, because nothing is stated otherwise¹.

When we evaluate his representation, Grover is an interesting character. Throughout the series, he is the stereotypical goofy sidekick character, as he often causes problems and is not nearly as brave as his compatriots. He goes on the initial quest with Percy in *The Lightning Thief* to redeem himself as a protector of half-bloods. His first attempt ended in disaster and the loss of a life, so Grover becomes a character that, once again, must prove himself. In the end, who is able to prove himself as he is selected as the one to find the lost god of nature, Pan. Grover is, in many aspects, the Ron Weasley of Riordan's world, and does not do much in the way of creating a diverse difference in Riordan's cast.

As stereotypes go, no middle-school read can go without the traditional bully character. Clarisse La Rue, daughter of war god Ares, fills that role in the first few novels of this series. In the first moment that we meet Clarisse, she immediately attacks Percy and Annabeth verbally

¹ In the film adaptation of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), Grover is actually portrayed by African-American actor Brandon T. Jackson. There is no official statement as to why, but this casting decision did diversify the movie.

and physically. She is described as a “big girl” (p. 89) and “ugly” (p. 89), and also clad in camouflage. Looking at this description through the lense of gender stereotypes, Clarisse is interesting in the sense that a female would not usually be considered the daughter of a male war god. Her non-feminine presence is something that can be looked at as breaking the mold, because a role of bully like this one would normally belong to a male character, and the descriptions that are used to describe Clarisse would be used to describe a masculine male character like this without a question.

Clarisse is an independent character as well, as she often pushes away the help of other characters, like in one of the early scenes of *The Sea of Monsters*, which is the second book in the series. She is another character out to prove herself, as she rejects the assistance of Percy and Annabeth when fighting mechanical bulls on the top of Half-Blood Hill (2006, p. 44). In this book, we see Clarisse receive her own quest due to her leadership skills and combat abilities. Throughout the rest of the novels, she begins to develop relationships with other campers, meaning a friendship with Annabeth in their search for the Labyrinth, and even a romantic relationship with a male demigod named Chris Rodriguez. Clarisse has one of the strongest character arcs of the secondary characters in this series, as she grows from a manic bully to a strong leader in the camp. Creating a female character that does not follow the traditional aspects of being feminine is a step forward for female characters, and shows that not all females must be “feminine” in order to maintain friendships with other women or romantic relationships with males.

Although Clarisse is an antagonist through most of the series, the main demigod antagonist in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* is Luke Castellan. Luke is one of the most deeply complex characters in the series, as are many well-developed villains in fantasy series.

Luke is a son of Hermes, the god of travellers, thieves, and merchants, and one of the first friends Percy makes at Camp Half-Blood. He is a role model for many in the camp as a head counselor, and becomes a mentor for Percy throughout the first book. Luke is described as older than the rest of the campers (when Percy is twelve Luke is nineteen) and also as “muscular and tall” (2005, p. 84). He also has a long scar down the side of his face, giving him a villainous air from the beginning. Again, the assumption here is that Luke is a white male, as we are not given any other details to steer us otherwise. Annabeth also develops a crush for the young man after they both spent around a year together, along with another demigod Thalia, who will be revisited later, running away from monsters and living on their own. Ultimately, Luke betrays the entire camp and joins the titan lord Kronos as he builds an army to destroy the Greek gods and all that they stand for.

But the most interesting part of Luke’s character, and where some very interesting aspects of his role in representation come into play, is in his backstory. In the fifth and final book of the series, *The Last Olympian*, Percy and Nico di Angelo, a character highlighted more in *The Heroes of Olympus* series, visit the childhood home of Luke. They meet his mother, who suffers from the side effects of trying to take on the mantle of Oracle (2009, p. 98). Throughout most of Luke’s life, Ms. Castellan was continuously subject to prophetic attacks and was not able to function in normal life due to her inability to separate reality from fiction. Hermes does attempt to take care of her, but Luke still develops a strong loathing for the gods who allowed his mother to become this way, which leads to his desire to destroy them. Though she is not specifically diagnosed with any specific mental illness in the series, there is still a correlation between her state and mental illness. Many of the readers who may have read Riordan’s books could relate to a story like Luke’s. Whether a parent or guardian have a mental illness, or struggle with

substance abuse, young readers can relate to the childhood that Luke endured. Mental illness is not addressed enough in many stories, and media in general, and, although Ms. Castellan does not represent anything specific, Luke and her's relationship highlights an important struggle that many young people face today.

* The third demigod that rounds out Annabeth's childhood trio is Thalia Grace. Being a daughter of Zeus, Thalia has the ability to control thunder, lightning, and wind. She is also considered one of the most powerful demigods alive, next to Percy Jackson. Thalia is one of my favorite characters in the series, as she is another one of Riordan's strong female characters. Thalia, Luke, and Annabeth were Grover's first assignment as a demigod protector. Grover's task was to find and lead the homeless Annabeth, Luke, and Thalia to Camp Half-Blood to live safely. But Thalia's powers drew many monsters to them, and, as they were entering the camp, Thalia sacrificed herself to save the rest of her friends. Zeus saw her bravery and honored Thalia by capturing her spirit in a pine tree that powers the magical boundary of Camp Half-Blood (2005, p. 115). Because of this tragic story, Riordan had already painted Thalia as a loyal and brave hero. At the end of the second book, Percy, Annabeth, and Grover return to camp with the Golden Fleece of legend, which they use to heal Thalia's tree that was poisoned during *The Sea of Monsters*. In the last moments of the novel, we find out that the magic "did its work too well" and Thalia was resurrected from the tree (2006, p. 277). This complicates the plot, as Percy was thought to be the center of an apocalyptic prophecy that tells of a child of a "Big Three" god (Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus) that, on their sixteenth birthday, decides the fate of Olympus and all of the gods. Since Thalia was only fifteen when she died, she was a viable option to fulfil this prophecy.

Thalia becomes a central character in *The Titan's Curse* as she joins Percy on the quest to locate Annabeth. She is described as "somewhere between punk and goth" (2007, p. 3) with choppy black hair and black clothing. Since not stated otherwise, we assume she is a white female. Thalia is a character that does not bring much physically to the diversity spectrum, but she does defy many stereotypes of female characters. Thalia is not only punk rock but another strong-willed leader who also eventually becomes the leader of the all female Hunters of Artemis after the death of their leader in the third book (2007, p. 292). She defies the expectation that she must find a male companion and states that, for the first time, she feels at home there among the female Hunters. This moment is one that not only shows the power of female bonds, but also recovers the reputation of female groups in the story. The relationship between Percy and the Hunters was difficult from the start, but, using Thalia and the quest as a bridging mechanism, Riordan creates a strong relationship between Thalia, the Hunters, and the demigods that stands through a majority of this series and also *The Heroes of Olympus* series.

Riordan tends to write fairly strong females, and his views of femininity in the battlefield have always been fascinating as a reader. Rachel is a young woman with charisma and independence, but she seems to be introduced to create a love triangle rather than to propel the plot forward in a beneficial way. Rachel is introduced in the third book when Percy, Thalia, Grover, and the Hunters find themselves at the Hoover Dam. Rachel, a mortal, should not be able to see the skeleton army that is chasing the heroes, but we discover that she is gifted with the ability to see through the Mist, the mystical vapor that distorts anything related to mythology so that humans cannot recognize these out-of-the-ordinary sights (2007, p. 213-214). Rachel saves Percy from the skeleton army by distracting them, allowing for Percy's escape. Rachel does not appear again until the fourth book of the series, *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, in which Percy

discovers that he and Rachel attend the same high school. Rachel and Percy form a bond after Percy discloses his identity as a demigod to her, and also explains that she is one of the few mortals (another being Percy's mother) that he knows who are able to see through the Mist. Rachel and Percy then become fast friends. Soon after this revelation, Rachel meets Annabeth. There is obviously tension between them, which Percy notices and chooses to ignore (2008, p. 16-17). Tension continues to build between Annabeth and Percy, leaving Percy to question his feelings for Annabeth, and allowing Rachel to confuse him even more.

Throughout the fourth novel, Rachel does come to play a different role: Because of her ability to see through the Mist, she is also able to see through the magic that makes the Labyrinth so difficult to navigate. Percy and Annabeth take Rachel with them as a guide as they maneuver their way through the Labyrinth, and, eventually, Annabeth and Rachel try to get to know each other. Some bonding does occur between the two, but Annabeth is never fully comfortable with the relationship between Percy and Rachel. The relationship between Percy and Rachel develops throughout the fifth book, confusing Percy even more, and also angering Annabeth right in the middle of the Titan War that serves as the climax in the final book. Rachel is reminiscent of the trope of Manic Pixie Dream Girl, which is a type of female character common in films that enters into a male character's life in order to help him escape from his sad or stressful reality. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl is usually quirky and childish, and focuses solely on the male protagonist's life in order to escape from her own. From a feminist perspective, this is one of the most hated tropes in the film world, as it shows women as a vehicle for men's happiness, and also shows them abandoning themselves in order for the man to benefit. Rachel falls for this notion. She is a red-haired and artsy girl, as she sports doodles and paint splatters on most of her clothing (2008, p. 3), and she also acts outside of the perceived normal, not truly caring what

others think of her. For example, she paints herself completely gold in order to raise money for an urban art program, and proceeds to yell about the world of Greek gods in the middle of a coffee shop (2008, p. 247). Her main moment of heroism in the fourth book comes when she hurls a bright blue plastic hairbrush at Kronos to stop him from coming after Percy (p. 304). Even this moment capitalizes on her uniqueness. We also discover that her relationship with her father is difficult, and that her rich family does not particularly concern themselves with her whereabouts. All of this, and her ability to see through the Mist, allows her to escape from her own world and into Percy's life. Percy also uses her to escape from the demigod lifestyle, as we especially see in the beginning of the fifth book, when we discover that the two have spent most of the summer together. Percy describes how he has used Rachel as an escape all summer when things became difficult at Camp Half-Blood with preparation for the war, stating that he needed a reminder "that the mortal world was still out there" (2009, p. 8). This moment truly shows how Rachel fits into the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope, and, on top of all this, she still is one of the legs of a love triangle trope, making Rachel a difficult character to defend when it comes to gender representation.

But in the end, Rachel breaks this trope, for the most part. She is able to immerse herself in this world, but find her own place without Percy being involved. Rachel starts to see images of the future, and she is able to doodle and draw them from memory. The elders at the camp find this to be unusual and a sign that she may have a prophetic gift, similar to that of Luke Castellan's mother. Rachel then goes through the process of taking on the spirit of the Oracle of Delphi, and soon after, tells Percy they cannot be anything more than friends (2009, p. 368). This moment shows that Rachel is taking her own life back from Percy and removing herself from the love triangle narrative. From that point on, Rachel begins her own plot line separate from Percy,

and appears in the later series in her role as the Oracle. She and Annabeth also become friends, once jealousy is removed from the picture, resolving this issue. Rachel is a complicated character, but, overall, Riordan redeems her as a character by allowing her to take on a role of her own within the mythology world.

There are multitudes of other characters in these novels, all serving in major and minor roles, whether they be villains, camp friends, or Greek gods. Here I have highlighted the characters that I found interesting in their representation and appeared often enough to justify an analysis. Overall, we see that most of these characters follow the norms set for race and sexual orientation, but each have his or her own way of breaking different mass-media molds. Out of the secondary characters, the only ones that are mentioned by name and are assumed to be of a different race or ethnicity are Charles Beckendorf, who is specifically described as African-American (2005, p. 55), and Ethan Nakamura, who is not specifically described as Asian, but we as readers make this assumption from his last name, which is Japanese. Other than these two specific named characters, and a small selection of side characters, almost all other characters are assumed Caucasian in this series. The Greek gods are also all assumed white as well due their European origin. No god is specifically described otherwise.

Throughout this series, we see a well-developed range of characters in the sense of representing different backgrounds and complex emotional arcs, but this set of characters follows the physical norms determined by traditional social and media typing. Riordan does his best to break most stereotypes, and takes time throughout his first mythology series to develop this complex group of characters as much as possible. Many of the main characters I analyzed here will appear again in later series, specifically *The Heroes of Olympus*, which combines this group of characters with a whole new group of demigods. As Riordan continued to write, we will see

that he implements a drastic change in his representation of people, but still provides solid emotional development, complex characters, and continues in his attempt to subvert stereotypes present in other forms of media.

The Kane Chronicles

After the roaring success of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, Riordan had much to live up to for his next series. After the release of *The Last Olympian*, Riordan stated that his next series would steer away from the Greek world and move on to what he believed is the next most popular mythology, Egyptian. *The Kane Chronicles* focuses on the lives of siblings Carter and Sadie Kane, who discover they are descended from a line of powerful Egyptian magicians. Carter and Sadie then begin a quest to maintain the order, or Ma'at, in the world that is being threatened by powerful evil forces. In many ways, this series stays true to the mythology-in-the-real-world plot line that Riordan created with *Percy Jackson* and keeps much of his humor alive. He also creates another round of relatable and complex characters that readers quickly grew to love.

One of the biggest changes here is the level of diversity introduced in this series. Riordan states that he was much more conscious this time around when it came to the physical diversity of his characters because he was taking on a culture rooted in the Middle East, but, because of European influences, was usually taken out of the context of African heritage (2012). In other words, he is very aware of the white-washing, or the removing of people of color, when it comes to the depiction of Egyptian culture in western media. For a recent example, the movie *Gods of Egypt* (2016) casted all white actors and actresses to portray Egyptian gods, goddesses, and pharaohs. *The Kane Chronicles*, released in 2010, is comprised of three books and is Riordan's

first series that utilizes multiple perspectives, as he writes in both Carter and Sadie's voice throughout the entirety of the series. Riordan writes the stories as if they were a transcript of a recording created by Carter and Sadie, so he maintains this first person perspective, but also switches between a male and female point of view. We also continue to see direct contact with Egyptian gods and mythological creatures, as well as a strong presence of magic throughout the books.

As stated before, Carter and Sadie Kane are brother and sister, but look almost nothing alike. The two siblings are actually biracial, having been born to an African-American father and a white mother. Carter Kane is the first of the two main characters we are introduced to in this series, which begins with the book *The Red Pyramid*. In his initial introduction, Carter tells us that he has grown up on the road, as he travels with his father, Julius, to various archaeological digs all around the world. Carter is extremely close to his father, and enjoys the freedom he has because of his father's occupation (2010, p. 2). In Carter's description of his father, we learn that Julius and Carter are both black, as Carter describes his father with "dark brown skin, like mine" (2010, p. 3), and we also learn that Carter wears his hair naturally curly in almost an Afro style. When Sadie is described by Carter later in the first chapter he states that "you would never guess that she's my sister" (p. 7). Sadie takes more after their white mother, so she has much lighter skin than her father and Carter, and also has "straight, caramel-colored hair" and blue eyes just like her mother (p. 7). Riordan not only gives us our first African-American lead character, but is also able to weave the cultural implications of biracial children and families into his story.

In the first few moments of *The Red Pyramid*, Riordan gives us an example of how biracial families may be treated, even though this concept is more acceptable in current culture. Carter, Sadie, and their father visit the British Museum, and are greeted by the curator, who is

assumed white. The curator immediately recognizes Carter as Dr. Kane's son, presumably because of their shared skin tone and other physical similarities, but asks who the young lady is who is accompanying them. Dr. Kane introduces Sadie as his daughter and the curator is obviously confused. Carter tells us in his narration that this happens to the family on a consistent basis, and that he hates it but "over the years, I've come to expect it" (2010, p. 18). There is also a moment in Sadie's first chapter of narration when she is talking with an inspector who is investigating the disappearance of their father, and the explosion that they accidentally created in the British Museum. The inspector asks Sadie about Carter's role in the explosion, at which Sadie guffaws because she knows her brother to be a strict rule follower who would never take a role in a plot like the one they had experienced. After Sadie refers to Carter as her brother, the inspector states "You consider him a proper brother, do you?" (2010, p. 36). Sadie is obviously offended and snaps back "What's that supposed to mean? Because he doesn't *look* like me?" (p. 36).

This is a blatant example of some internalized racism from outside characters, and another example of what biracial families encounter in public. It is not always normal for the children of a biracial family to be so drastically different, but it is possible. Here Riordan shows us one of the most striking examples of biracial children, and may be using Sadie here as the white aspect of a biracial family because the mother is no longer alive at this point in the story. Many biracial families experience reactions like this, and possibly worse, on a daily basis and Riordan demonstrating this cultural reality allows children of this family structure to relate to and understand what the Kanes go through when together. Riordan also touches on the concept of "broken families", because, after their mother's death, there was a very fierce and lengthy court battle over the custody of the two children. The Kanes' maternal grandparents wanted custody

over Sadie, because they blamed the death of their daughter on Dr. Kane. There is an assumption that they specifically wanted Sadie because she was so reminiscent of their late daughter (2010, p. 3). So Sadie grew up in London with her grandparents, and Carter on the road with his father, further cementing their drastic difference and also highlighting the custody system and how it can split apart families like this one.

Carter Kane is the older of the two Kane siblings, and has a vast amount of knowledge about Egyptian mythology due to the influence of his father. As stated before, Carter possesses more African-American qualities than his sister, and has lived with his father on the road for around eight years at this point in his life, meaning Carter has had very little experience making friends. Carter is typed as a traditional “geek” character, being socially awkward and very involved in books and history instead of with sports or other traditionally masculine pastimes. It is even stated that Carter’s father used to tell him to “put the book down and play some ball” (2010, p. 2). Carter is a character that encounters some traditional pitfalls when it comes to male “geek” characters. His interactions with Zia Rashid, his love interest in the series, are always very awkward, as many interactions are when someone is a young teenager, and he often has to be coaxed into action by his more outgoing sister. But despite some of these pitfalls, Carter is able to remove himself from this traditional narrative throughout the development of the series.

Despite Carter’s assumed non masculine traits and interests, Carter is given traditionally masculine skills like his fluency in combat magic and his strong leadership abilities. His skill in combat magic is a natural affinity, but the leadership is a trait that Carter has to grow into as he is very insecure, another common trait of “geek” characters, about his abilities to lead the newly found Brooklyn House cohort of young magicians. In the first book, we find out that Carter is the mortal host of the Egyptian god Horus, meaning that Carter is able to communicate with

Horus's spirit in his mind and also tap into some of Horus's ancient powers, like the ability to turn into a falcon. Horus is considered "the Avenger" of the gods because he defeated Set after the death of his father, Osiris (2010, p. 219). He is also considered skilled in combat and is a traditional male hero in many ways. The connection Carter and Horus have is that of a mentor and mentee, and it enables Carter to find a balance between both sides of himself; the masculine combat-oriented side, and the "geek" parts of himself that he is more comfortable with. In the end of the series, Carter grows into his physical strength, his magical strength, and his leadership skills as moves into his role as the first Pharaoh in thousands of years (2012, p. 327). But he also keeps his personality traits like his inability to talk to Zia competently, and his loves for history, reading, and teaching. All in all, Riordan writes Carter as someone who finds a balance between embracing masculinity and as well as the parts of himself that fall outside of that norm. By placing this character in such a high leadership role, over a more traditionally masculine character like Walt Stone, Riordan highlights the importance of embracing all sides of oneself, and shows young men who are struggling with the prescribed masculinity standards in their life, that they do not have to follow the societal traditions of being a cisgendered male.

Sadie Kane is the younger sibling that makes up *The Kane Chronicles* duo. Sadie's narrative in the story revolves more around her emotional struggle and effort to come to terms with her feelings for two of the men in her life. Sadie is still considered one of the three most powerful magicians of the time, along with Carter and their uncle Amos Kane, and she is also the host of the goddess Isis. Sadie follows a similar pattern to Carter, as she also finds a balance between prescribed feminine traits and the traits she values within herself that are traditionally frowned upon because of their more masculine appeal, like her affinity for combat boots and leather jackets. She is, as is Riordan's fashion, another strong female character, who shows more

of a punk side. She sports colored streaks in her hair and loves her combat boots, but is shown fighting through complex emotions like the grief for her father and mother, developing a strong bond with her brother, and also managing her feelings for two important people in her life, one of which also faces a threat of a predicted young death. Often female characters are only considered a strong and admirable female character only if they are physically strong, intelligent, and defy all norms of femininity. But Sadie Kane displays an important combination of these two qualities as she is developed as a complex character rather than one dimensional. She has her strengths, like a strong will and an affinity for magic and incantations, but is also able to follow a well-developed emotional arc.

Sadie originally rejects the concept of having any emotional attachment to other people, including romantically. She also looks down on other females her age because of the “boy-crazy” state in which they live their lives. Sadie’s friends from her life before the introduction of magic are traditional preteen girls, who, as Sadie states, are “a bit crazed” (2010, p. 39) when it comes to boys. At the age of twelve, Sadie does not understand this preoccupation, and looks down on her boy-crazy friends. But Riordan finds a balance for Sadie, as he does for Carter, but does not allow Sadie to lose herself or her purpose in the quest for love. She still trains new young recruits for the Brooklyn House, the cohort of magicians that Carter and Sadie create to rehabilitate Egyptian magic in the United States. She also plays an important role in the defeat of Apophis, the evil serpent god that threatens to destroy the world. Overall, Sadie is a character that finds herself, as Carter does, through magic, but also through the power of relationships, as she now understands connections in her life, whether they be romantic or family bonds like the one that develops with her brother.

One of the objects of Sadie's affection is Walt Stone, a character introduced in the second book of the series, *The Throne of Fire*. Walt is described as a "lean and muscular" young man around age fourteen, who has "coffee-bean brown" skin (2011, p. 8), meaning he is another African-American character we meet in this series, and continues to broaden the amount of diversity we see in this series's main characters. Walt is a kind-hearted character who cares deeply about the people in his life. And, we see that this ability to care so much does not diminish his strength or ability to craft charms with deftness. Walt is introduced very deliberately it seems for the purpose of creating a love triangle for Sadie, as she also harbors feelings for Anubis, the god of death in Egyptian mythology. We see more of Walt throughout the series, because he is mortal than Anubis who is forbidden in the beginning of the third book to see Sadie at all. Both men have very strong feelings for Sadie, and, because of these feelings, the two of them decide to work together in a very peculiar manner.

Walt is descended from the line of Akhenaton, a line of pharaohs that happens to include the famous "boy pharaoh" Tutankhamun, and is plagued by the curse of that family which causes young men in the line to die at a very young age (2011, p. 276). Due to his desire to stay alive, specifically because of his budding relationship with Sadie he states, Walt reaches out to Anubis to see if there is anything that can be done to save him. Anubis and Walt plot for the entirety of *The Throne of Fire* and *The Serpent's Shadow* to save Walt's life, despite both of them having feelings for Sadie. This collaboration is very different from the relationships between Riordan's female characters when they are interested in the same male character. The females are usually jealous and very open about their dislike of the other. In the end, we find out that Walt has decided to become the host of Anubis, which would allow him to stay alive and also allow Anubis to maintain a mortal form (2012, p. 272). This caused Sadie, as well as the readers, much

grief and confusion, as the two men were now one, which is different than the other form of hosting that Carter and Sadie demonstrate in earlier books. Throughout the rest of the series, they are referred to as Walt/Anubis and maintain until nearly the end that they are two people merged into one. It's all very confusing, and also slightly problematic.

People of color, specifically black people, are often disposable characters in all forms of media, and this is not Riordan's first demonstration of this in his books. Charles Beckendorf, mentioned in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, is one of the first casualties in the Titan War. His death seems to be used to demonstrate that people will perish in the war, and, since he was a character that the readers cared enough about but was not important to the plot line, he could be killed off without too much consequence. Walt's near death is very reminiscent of Beckendorf's but not quite as tragic. In modern media, there is a very high rate of what is known as the "white savior complex" which means a white person saving people of color from their plight. Anubis is described in his first appearance in *The Red Pyramid* as having a "pale complexion", which would allow us to assume he is white in his mortal form. Although this particular situation is more a fusing than a saving, and requires Walt to make a decision, which many of the people of color who are saved due to white savior complex do not get to do, there is some struggle for me in accepting this plot point from a diversity and representation perspective. Overall, Riordan handles the situation well, as Walt is able to maintain his own form rather than taking on Anubis's, but the whole situation is slightly tainted by this problematic notion.

Zia Rashid is the final human character that makes up the main band of teenage characters in *The Kane Chronicles*. Zia is in many ways the Annabeth of this series. She is the brains of the operation on many occasions, a character who has grown up immersed in the mythology featured in the series, she is perpetually strong and is also able to show emotion

around the male character she is interested in. Although she is not as present as Annabeth is in *Percy Jackson*, she still plays an extremely important role in the plot of the series. When she first appears in *The Red Pyramid*, Zia is described as having “caramel-colored skin” and “vaguely Arab features” (2010, p. 134). We can assume then that she is a person of color, and Arabian, and we later discover that she was born and raised in a Egyptian village on the Nile (p. 207). She further adds to the diverse makeup of the group, leaving Sadie as the only main character with white characteristics. Her emotional arc is not as strong as that of Sadie’s, but we are also not privy to her innermost thoughts as we are to Sadie’s. Zia is fierce and serious most of the time, having the staple traits of Riordan’s strong females, but she also shows a sympathetic and even timid side when she opens up to Carter for the first time. Zia is also a character that plays an important role in the plot, more so than just serving as a love interest. She is able to break out of the love interest role by also serving as a key player in the resurrection of the sun god Ra, and later, as the host for the god in the battle to defeat Apophis (2010, p. 322). Zia is able to hold her own throughout the series, and her strength and ability are what allow Carter to be attracted to her. Therefore, she is able to be her own person, even with limited appearances in the series.

Most of the characters we see represent a variety of races and types of people, like most of the gods being described as either white, African-American, or, in some cases, like Horus, we can conclude that they are biracial in nature (as Isis and Osiris are direct replicas of the Kane parents, making Horus, their son, biracial like the two Kane children). There are also many background characters that are never fully described, so we assume them to be white as we do other non specified characters. Overall, *The Kane Chronicles* demonstrates a wide array of characters of all racial backgrounds, which makes this series drastically different in physical

terms than *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. This is a win for diversity in many ways, and Riordan only grows from this point forward.

The Heroes of Olympus

Soon after the release of *The Kane Chronicles*, Riordan announced he would be revisiting the world of Percy Jackson and the Greek gods. This meant revisiting Camp Half Blood, Percy, Annabeth, and many other characters from *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, as well as introducing an entirely new Roman camp (Camp Jupiter), the Roman side of the Greek gods we grew to know in the first series, and several new and diverse characters. The series is comprised of five books in total, with Riordan using third-person voice from the perspective of nine different main characters throughout the series. This the most characters of any series of Riordan's so far, and each character is very different in personality and representation as a whole. Also, this is the first and only series of Riordan's that uses a 3rd person omniscient voice for each characters, which allows Riordan to take on more voices in the series than he did in any of the his others. There is no particular main character in this series, allowing for a diverse cast that readers get to know and love as a whole rather than just seeing the perspective of one or two characters.

In *The Lost Hero*, we are introduced to a trio of three brand new demigods who serve as our gateway into the series, and allow the readers to comprehend the combination of both the Greek and Roman mythologies. The first character that we meet in this trio is Jason Grace. He is described early on in *The Lost Hero*, the first installment of the series, as having "close-cropped blond hair" and "sky blue eyes" (2010, p. 33). From this description we can assume that Jason is a Caucasian male, and, because of his relationship with a female demigod (Piper), we can also

assume he is heterosexual. Overall, Jason is one of the more normative characters in the series, serving as the “blond Superman” (2012, p. 243) in the group of heroes. He shares the main leadership role with Percy, who returns along with Annabeth in this series, and he is considered in many ways the perfect demigod. Jason is the son of the Roman form of Zeus, Jupiter, and has been raised by Juno, the Roman form of Hera, while he is growing up. His whole life is surrounded by mythology, unlike many of the other half-blood characters that we meet who usually live a mortal life before recognizing they are demigods. Knowing his identity from the beginning leads to Jason remaining more of a static character throughout the series, as his only main struggles are grappling with the idea of sharing leadership with another strong male demigod and balancing leadership of the Roman camp with his new love for the Greek camp. Riordan, in a further allusion to Superman, does have Jason diagnosed with nearsightedness in the final book of the series, *The Blood of Olympus*, which causes Jason to begin wearing glasses. We can interpret this as Riordan marking Jason’s acceptance of his imperfections as he is seen as almost completely flawless throughout the majority of the series. He is, in a way, a reverse Superman, as we see Jason accept his Clark Kent side more. He does find a balance, as most of Riordan’s characters do, but overall Jason is not overly notable on a representation level.

Also in the first book, we meet Piper McLean, a daughter of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. Piper is described as having “chocolate brown hair” that has “thin strands braided on the sides” (2010, p. 4) and also as not wearing makeup, a fact that Riordan uses as a direct contrast to Piper’s lineage as Aphrodite is the goddess of love and beauty and her children are usually obsessed with traditionally feminine pastimes like makeup and gossip magazines. Piper also reveals to us that she is half Cherokee, with her father is a full-blooded Native American actor. She states that being called a halfblood was normal for her even before she discovered she

was a demigod, as many people would call her this and it was often “not a compliment (p. 33). Piper is Riordan’s first Native American character, but obviously not his first biracial character. Riordan uses Piper to touch on some of the traditions of Native American culture without appropriating a culture that is often stripped down to just its base characteristics in modern media. There is a moment that we see in a flashback when Piper and her father are sharing a moment on the farm owned by Piper’s Grandpa Tom. In this moment, Piper asks her father directly why he never chooses to play Native American roles in movies, even though he has played roles that were many other ethnicities and nationalities, including Latino, Syrian, and Israeli. Piper’s father explains that Native American roles are “too close to home” (p. 233) and that he does not believe that there are high quality roles for Native American characters in the film industry. Riordan uses this moment to point out the constant appropriation of Native American culture in modern media. Piper is a fresh take on this racial identity and allows Riordan to teach others about the nuances of Native American culture, as least on a minor scale.

Piper also challenges many assumed traits of femininity in this series. As a daughter of Aphrodite, Piper faces many stereotypes believed by other campers, as they expect her to be focused on her looks and follow the societal concepts of beauty. Piper usually rejects this concept as beauty has never been her main focus. She even further rejects, even resents, traditional standards of beauty after she is claimed by her mother, Aphrodite, and “blessed” with a makeover worthy of a Grecian goddess. Piper tries to remove the blessing but is unsuccessful. She then must sport the look throughout a majority of *The Lost Hero*. The blessing, even though extravagant, does allow Piper to understand that beauty does not limit strength, and allows her to trust in her own powers of Charmspeak, which is the power to persuade others through the spoken word. Piper begins to recognize that femininity does not equate to weakness and that she

can be strong while also embracing the feminine side of her lineage. She even challenges the head counselor of the Aphrodite Cabin, Drew Tanaka, because the counselor has been using her powers to control her fellow cabin mates. Through all of this, Piper begins to understand that beauty and love can be powerful in their own right, and that femininity is something that can be accepted rather than rejected, because being feminine does not make one weak.

The final character in the initial trio is Leo Valdez, a fan favorite character and Riordan's first Latino character of note. Leo is described as resembling a "Latino Santa's elf" (2010, p. 5) with curly dark hair and boyish facial features. He is the son of Hephaestus, making him skilled with machines of all kinds, and also giving him the power of fire, something that he has a hard time controlling. He is Mexican-American specifically, as his mother grew up in Mexico and then lived in the United States, making a living as an auto mechanic. Riordan is very conscious in this series to avoid Latino stereotypes. Leo does speak Spanish around his mother, before she dies when he is young, and otherwise acknowledges his heritage, but overall, stereotypes often seen in media are otherwise avoided. Throughout the series, Leo struggles with being an outcast. He was cut off by his family after his mother's death. Also, within the group of seven demigods, all of which grow very close over the course of the series, Leo often feels like the odd one out. Riordan has the tendency to pair off his characters, unless they choose to join a group of all female warriors who have sworn off men. Usually his main characters, and most of his featured secondary characters, often end up with significant others throughout the course of his books. In this series in particular, all seven of the main demigods end up dating someone by the end of the series. Leo's love interest takes the form of Calypso, the stranded goddess that appeared for a short period of time in *Percy Jackson*. But, before this, Leo constantly complains about his inability to get a date and how he feels that he is not worthy of love. Many teenagers feel this

way, especially when everyone around them is pairing up and moving into romantic relationships. Riordan quells Leo's fears of being alone by introducing Calypso into his story, but, in a way, this also makes the statement that someone cannot feel complete or whole without having a romantic love interest. I find this concept difficult to comprehend in its context, as it sends a message to the young audience consuming this book that people do not matter until they have someone to matter to. From a feminist perspective, finding a significant other is not necessarily wrong and allows for great personal growth, but it should not be the defining factor of a person's development. This is true for both male and female characters in any of Riordan's series, but, also, for a juvenile fiction series to be successful, a romance is also required.

As we move into the second book of the series, *The Son of Neptune*, we see the reintroduction of a very familiar character. Percy Jackson reappears in this series, along with Annabeth, but this time, Percy has no memory of who he is until later in the series. Hera performs a trade between the Greek and Roman camps, trading their two leaders in order to foster cooperation between the two groups of demigods. The second book in the series sees Percy team up with two new demigods and also solidify his leadership skills by taking over as the praetor, or general, at the Roman Camp Jupiter. Throughout the later half of the series, we see Percy and Annabeth grow in maturity as they become the oldest couple, and the most experienced, within the group of demigods. They carry the same traits and general representation that they do throughout the *Percy Jackson* series, but now they are navigating a relationship as well as another possible war, this time with the giants and the ancient goddess Gaea. We even see them navigate the realm of Tartarus together in the fourth book of the series, *The House of Hades*. Throughout it all, we see Percy and Annabeth bond in a mature, almost adult way, making decisions about their future together. One of the major issues here though is the amount

of jealousy that is made perpetual on Annabeth's end of the relationship. When we are able to read from Annabeth's perspective, which begins in the third book of the series, *The Mark of Athena*, we immediately see Annabeth grappling with immense jealousy towards another female character. The jealousy is more prevalent than the joy she feels after being reunited with Percy after his disappearance. She does explain away the attraction she thought another girl had for Percy, but she still remains on guard throughout the series.

Eventually, Annabeth becomes more comfortable around the other female characters of the series, possibly because she does not see them as a threat due to their attachments. We even see her develop strong female friendships, which we do not see much in any of Riordan's other series (the only true female friendship we see is that of Annabeth and Thalia, but we are not able to see much because of the nature of the *The Titan's Curse*). The bond that is created between Annabeth, Piper, and Hazel (one of the other seven demigods of prophecy) is refreshing to see in Riordan's work, and shows girls who are avid readers of these books that not every girl is a threat. Although Riordan can grow in this area, this is still a strength in this series over the other four so far.

Also in *The Son of Neptune*, we are introduced to Hazel Levesque. Hazel is one of the younger members of the seven demigods, being only thirteen, and is described from Percy's perspective as being "darker-skinned" with "curly hair sticking out of the sides of her helmet" (2011, p. 20-21). From this description, we can conclude that Hazel is African-American, making her the first African-American female character that Riordan has written in his series so far. Hazel was actually grew up in the 1940's in New Orleans, and was born to a mortal mother and Pluto, the Roman form of Hades. In order to prove his devotion to Hazel's mother, he blessed Hazel with the ability to draw gold, gems, and other precious materials out of the ground,

but, when any of these precious materials are touched by anyone other than Hazel, the person becomes cursed. Hazel and her mother, because of Hazel's gift, eventually draw the attention of the corrupted "earth mother" Gaea. After being controlled by Gaea for so long, the Levesques sacrifice themselves in order to stop Gaea from raising a giant. Hazel is eventually brought back to life by another child of Pluto/Hades (Nico di Angelo), and is given a fresh start at her teenage life. All of this leads Hazel to find the Roman camp, and she constantly attempts to prove herself, because she feels that she has been afforded another chance at life.

Because of this need to prove she is worthy to live again, Hazel strives to be a leader. She remains calm in many situations of chaos, and, similar to Annabeth, uses her strategic mind to aid the group in crisis. In the fourth book of the series, *The House of Hades*, Hazel takes on the role of secondary leader on the demigods' ship *Argo II*, due to the absence of Percy and Annabeth. Hazel has to come to the realization that, even though she is young and is not as physically strong as the other demigods, she still has the ability to lead. Hazel also grows to understand her curse, and uses the knowledge of the curse to her advantage in times of need. Even though she resents magic because of this curse, she also learns to understand that magic is a part of her, as she develops the ability to control the Mist, the magical veil over the mortal world.

Overall, Hazel is a strong and mindful leader, overcoming her age and her past in order to become her own person. During a moment with the goddess Hecate, who pushes her down the path of magic, Hazel states "I'm not choosing one of your paths. I'm making my own" (2013, p. 29). This moment in particular proves Hazel is a strong character, but not without emotional complexity as she tries to cope with living in a new time period and without any family of her own. Hazel represents a strong African-American character who does not follow the stereotypes for African-American women, which is something that young black women who read this series

will find important, as they are able to see someone they can look up to. Hazel grows to understand that her abilities and her past make her stronger, and this growth is inspiring for so many readers.

The seventh demigod of the demigods of prophecy is Frank Zhang, a son of the war god Mars, the Roman counterpart of Ares. When Percy first meets Frank, he describes the Roman demigod as having a “babyish face” which contrasted starkly with his “big burly frame” and his black “military haircut” (2011, p. 31). This description of Frank’s size compared to his face represents Frank’s personality and character arc as well. Frank is stated to be Canadian with Chinese descent later in *The Son of Neptune*. He is another male character who grapples with masculinity, but does so even more because of his parentage. Mars/Ares is considered the “manliest” of the gods, as combat is traditionally a very masculine skill. Frank was never considered the bravest demigod at Camp Jupiter before being sent on a quest by his godly father, but, throughout the series, Frank grows to trust his abilities and himself. In a flashback, we learn that Frank’s mother was in the military and was killed by sniper fire in Afghanistan. After learning this, we can assume Riordan is establishing an expectation of masculinity in Frank through both of his parents.

We also meet Frank’s grandmother, a proud Chinese woman who believes that Frank should have pride in his culture, rather than rejecting it as he seems to. In the first moments when we meet Grandmother, we learn that the traditional expectations of masculinity also stem from her as she states, “Men do not cry. Especially Zhang men” (2011, p. 117). Frank’s struggle with his past and his abilities mirrors that of Carter Kane’s. There is a definite expectation that Frank must be continuously strong as the son of warriors, and that his emotions should not get in the way. But, eventually, Frank finds a balance between the two sides of himself, and learns to

accept his masculine abilities. He also embraces his own traits, like his deep care and sympathy for those around him. Because of this acceptance, in the final book Frank even becomes the new praetor, or leader, of Camp Jupiter in the final book.

One of the more troubling parts of Frank's story though is the moment when Frank receives a blessing from his father (unwanted gifts seems to be a common theme throughout this series). In *The House of Hades*, Frank accomplishes a dangerous feat in order to save his friends. After his achievement, Mars comes to him complimenting him on his ability to overcome his fear, and also blessing him with a more muscular, taller, older-looking body than the one he had before. Frank is at first self-conscious about his new body, but Hazel, his girlfriend at this point in the story, immediately states he looks amazing. This transformation is sudden, and, in a way, demeans Frank's old body and his boyish looks. Before, his body was bulky and soft, which is not seen as worthy of the Mars name. After the gift, he develops more muscle, grows multiple inches, and becomes leaner like a warrior. This feels like a statement towards the unmanliness of Frank's previous form, and that he is now worthy of being a warrior because of his musculature. Body representation is something Riordan still struggles with in his books, as most of his characters are lean, muscular, and usually athletic. Frank strayed from this Riordan norm in this way until this moment in the fourth book. Frank remained his optimistic, clumsy, and bumbling self, but, after his body change, he seemed to be more respected by his peers.

Nico di Angelo is another character that is featured throughout *The Heroes of Olympus*, even though he is not technically a member of the seven demigods of prophecy. Nico first appears in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, featured in the third book of the series with his sister, Bianca. Although he plays a significant role in this series, his true addition to the diversity in Riordan's universe does not come into play until later in *The Heroes of Olympus*. Throughout

both series, Nico has consistently been an outsider. We find out that he slips between camps, working with both groups of demigods, but he is not truly accepted at either because of his status as a child of Hades/Pluto. The god of death is not revered in either culture, and his children are seen as cursed. Therefore, Nico has a difficult time fitting in. He also loses his sister in the *Percy Jackson* series (a death Nico blames on Percy because he swore to protect her), and he never truly comes to terms with his grief, causing him to cut himself off from all other people besides those in the Underworld. In the *House of Hades*, we finally get a glimpse of another significant reason Nico separates himself from others.

Nico is accompanied by Jason Grace on his quest to claim Diocletian's scepter, and on their journey they encounter Cupid. Cupid traps the two boys and begins manipulating Nico to reveal his true thoughts and feelings before Cupid will give up the scepter. Eventually, Cupid forces Nico to make a confession: "I had a crush on Percy" (2013, p. 292). As the conversation continues, we learn that Nico felt that he could not be accepted mostly because he did not accept his sexuality. Jason, being present for this whole ordeal, does not push Nico in the moment, telling Nico that it was his "decision to share or not" (2013, p. 293), while also being supportive and understanding in Nico's moment of need. Later on, the two share another moment, and Jason confronts Nico once more about his coming out. Jason believes that Nico would be accepted by his friends, gay or not. Jason states that no one would judge him because "it's not like you've got a choice. It's just who you are" (2013, p. 428).

Nico rejects this and continues to struggle with his sexuality throughout the rest of the series, until the fifth book, *The Blood of Olympus*. Once the battle against Gaea has been won, and Nico has been recognized for his efforts to save the world, Nico decides to "clear the air" with Percy and Annabeth. He tells Percy that he had a crush on him, but "I'm over that now"

(2014, p. 488). Percy is shocked for a moment, then Annabeth gives Nico a high-five, solidifying their friendship. Nico then decides to stay at Camp Half-Blood, finally feeling accepted by the other demigods. Nico's sexuality, and the acceptance of this fact by him and others, was an important step for representation in this series Nico's journey mirrors that of many other young people, and by giving his readers Nico's story, they have someone to connect with.

The final perspective that we are able to see in this series is that of Roman praetor and child of Bellona, Reyna Avila Ramírez-Arellano. She is described by Percy as having "dark, piercing eyes" and "long black hair" (2011, p. 27). Her diversity in this series stems from the fact that she is Puerto-Rican in descent, having been born there and then sent to live on the island of the sea-witch, Circe. Reyna even makes a brief appearance in *The Sea of Monsters* during Percy and Annabeth's stay on the island. Reyna is a secondary character turned main character during this series. She is first seen in only her leadership role as a praetor of Camp Jupiter, as she leads the entire camp by herself during Jason's absence (he is a former praetor of the camp). We see Reyna struggle to make the best decisions for the group, trying to be rational, strong willed, and overall an exemplary role model for all of the campers. Reyna is a character that I wish we could have seen develop more. She appears throughout most of the series, but, like Nico, we only see her perspective in *The Blood of Olympus*. We are able to watch Reyna grow into her role as a leader, as she gains confidence in herself and begins to be more accepting of others. But, we do not see much of her emotional complexity except for a short moment shared between her and Nico in the final book. Overall, Reyna is a character who succeeds in leadership and serves as a model for young women, showing them that any person can be a prestigious leader, even a female like Reyna.

Overall, we see diversity grow exponentially in this series in the representations of characters from multiple different cultural and racial backgrounds. We are even introduced to our first gay character (and even second if we count Will Solace, Nico's potential love interest), which is a notable step forward in this series. Throughout *The Heroes of Olympus*, Riordan introduces us to a diverse group of nine characters that allow almost any reader to relate to. Throughout the entirety of the series, we see development of character, subversion of gender expectations, and, overall, a deeply complex group of individuals that can open minds and increase understanding.

Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard

After three very successful series, two of which visited and expanded on the same mythological universe, Riordan was poised to take on a new mythology in his next series. Riordan comments on his personal website that his next favorite mythology is Norse mythology, mostly because of its influence on *The Lord of the Rings* series of novels, which was his favorite series as a child (Riordan, 2017). Riordan was finally able to dive into this realm through his series that began in 2015, with the title *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*. This series follows the titular character Magnus Chase as he dies during an epic battle and is taken to Valhalla, the Norse realm for deceased heroes. Riordan's version of Valhalla takes the form of a hotel where deceased demigods live out their afterlives and prepare for Ragnarok, which is the Norse doomsday. This series continues in the same vein as Riordan's three other series, and takes place in the same universe as the other three. The series is still in progress (the third book will be released in October of 2017), but Riordan was able to create such a diverse and complex

cast of characters within the confines of just two books that I was able to include this series in this analysis.

Magnus Chase introduces himself to the audience in a way that is reminiscent of Percy Jackson's initial first lines. Magnus reveals to his audience that he is in fact dead, and warns them quickly to try not to also "die in agony" (2015, p. 3). His death is what propels his story forward instead of serving as an ending, as his mortal life leaves something to be desired.

Magnus is a homeless youth who lives on the streets of Boston after his mother has mysteriously died two years earlier. He sleeps on park benches, which is where we first meet him, and all of his belongings fit inside his backpack. Magnus is described later in the first book of the series, *The Sword of Summer*, as bearing a resemblance to the late Kurt Cobain, with a jaw-length "curtain of dirty-blond hair" and pale almost "translucent" skin (2015, p. 109). Therefore, we can assume that Magnus is, again, a white lead character, and male due to the use of pronouns, but diversifies the representation in the series by representing the homeless population.

Homelessness is a major issue, especially among teenagers, and Riordan uses Magnus's plight to educate his readers of all ages about this issue.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, there are around 1.3 million teenagers living on the streets unsupervised (2016). These youth may have run away or been kicked out of their homes for numerous reasons, but they are continuously struggling to survive. Magnus Chase illustrates this issue in many ways, but with the signature humor and sarcasm that are staples for Riordan. In the beginning of the first book, Magnus describes the irony of how homeless youth are thought of by the general public. He tells us that, yes, many of us may feel sorry for him, or even think he is a "loser," but usually the public will ignore him and just hope that he does not ask for money (2015, p. 4). Magnus may fall within our white, male norm, as we

saw with Percy and Jason in previous series, but Riordan uses Magnus to highlight an issue many of us would rather ignore, and allows his readers to learn and understand that homelessness is not always a choice, but something so many people, even teenagers their age, must live with.

Magnus's life on the street is riddled with hardship, like running from police and those who wish to harm him, but he is able to get by with the help of his "mom and dad" that aid him with his life on the street (2015, p. 5). Blitz is the first of these two that we meet. Magnus describes him as a "dirty hurricane" as he looks windblown and has wiry black hair that sticks out in many directions. It is also stated that his skin is "the color of saddle leather" which we can interpret as darker brown, meaning Blitz is African-American. At first, Blitz is assumed to be homeless, like Magnus, but we soon find out that Blitz is actually a dwarf (which explains why he stands at only around five feet tall) that is sent to protect Magnus after it is discovered that Magnus is the demigod son of Frey. Blitz is one of the few characters in Riordan stories that is a mythological character that is also a person of color. Usually these characters are assumed white, as the traits that make them different are usually half-goat bodies and having only one eye, and these are the traits that are focused on. Blitz, or Blitzen, which is his full dwarf name, is also an interesting character in that he combines traditionally masculine skills with nontraditionally masculine interests.

As a dwarf, Blitz is skilled in crafting, creating a special tanning bed for his elf companion, Hearthstone, for example, and is able to make weapons and armor that aid Magnus and his other companions in their quest to defeat Loki and the Fenris Wolf. But, overall, Blitz is much more interested in creating fashion than weapons. He has a well-developed taste when it comes to clothing, and is always mindful of his appearance. Blitz attended dwarf trade school for fashion, which is uncommon in the dwarf world, as true dwarf crafting comes in the form of

creating weapons, armor, and items useful in their eyes (2015, p. 300). Blitzen takes part in a competition to prove that he is a worthy craftsman, and makes fashionable and versatile armor that wins him the contest and allows him to find a balance between what is expected of him and how he truly wants to express himself. Blitz is a character that embraces his nontraditional interests, and, in the second book, *The Hammer of Thor*,^{*} uses them to succeed in opening a clothing and armor shop for dwarves. So far, Blitz is a character that has embraced himself and his heritage, as he is able to show that crafting clothing is just as honorable as crafting weapons to his close-minded dwarf peers.

Hearthstone is the “mom” of Magnus’s surrogate homeless parents. In the mortal world, Hearthstone, Hearth for short, appears homeless like Blitz and Magnus, but we soon find out that he is an elf that works with Blitzen to protect Magnus in the mortal world. Hearth is one of Riordan’s first characters that outwardly displays a disability, as he is deaf and communicates using American Sign Language. In his previous series, Riordan struggled with the representation of disabled peoples, because, as seen in the case of both Grover and Tyson in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, characters that he first portrays as disabled in some manner, whether that be physically or mentally, usually are revealed to be faking those conditions in order to hide their true forms as mythological creature. For young readers who may have a disability of some form, this could be disheartening, as the characters that share their situations are explained away with the use of mythology. Hearth, then, is a fresh take on this issue as his deafness remains present throughout the entirety of the series so far. Riordan handles Heath’s deafness in a very appealing way, as he never ignores the fact that Hearth is signing, describing what certain signs would look like in motion, and writing Hearth’s dialogue in italics, so we are aware that Hearth is communicating differently throughout the books.

In the second book, *The Hammer of Thor*, we get a more in-depth look at the world of elves and at Hearthstone's home life. Magnus meets Hearth's father, who is incredibly wealthy, as are many of the elves living in the elf realm, Alfheim. We learn that throughout most of Hearthstone's childhood, Hearth was constantly berated and shamed by his family and others for his deafness. His father was not accepting of his son, which we understand right away when his father dismisses Hearth's means of communication as "ridiculous hand-waving" (2016, p. 176). Hearth allows readers to understand what happens when a child is not accepted by his or her family, which often leads to homelessness. Although Hearth is a young elf rather than a human, Riordan uses Hearth to portray the story that resonates with so many young people. Hearth may resonate not only with youth who have been expelled or chased away from their own home, but also with those who have different abilities than those around them. Communication is something humans rely on constantly, but we often do not understand that some humans have to learn different ways to communicate because they are unable to verbally do so. This does not make them less than hearing people, but just different. Dealing with this difference can be difficult for many, and, by making this character a main character in this series, Riordan allows others to see that those with what we consider to be disabilities can fully participate in our world as valuable members of society.

Riordan continues to diversify this cast in new and varying ways by introducing the first character in any of his series that identifies with a religious institution. Samirah Al-Abbas is first introduced during Magnus's thrilling death scene on the Longfellow Bridge. Samirah, or Sam, is a Valkyrie, a type of scout that finds demigods as they die and determine whether or not they die heroically enough to be transported to Valhalla. Sam is first described by Magnus as she is riding a horse made completely of mist above the battle. Magnus states that Sam sports a helmet while

wearing a headscarf underneath. We later learn that this headscarf is actually a hijab, and that Sam is Arab American and Muslim. Riordan uses Samirah to explain many of the cultural norms of the Muslim community, including wearing a hijab, and arranged marriages (2015, p. 221). We find out in *The Sword of Summer* that Sam is betrothed to her distant cousin Amir, and that she has been in love with him since she was around twelve-years-old. She manages to lead a double life, handling her school work and her tasks as a Valkyrie. Riordan gives us another strong, and complex female character with Sam, as we see her battle and stand up for others, as well as love and grieve with other characters in the series. She is the only cis-gendered female main character, but she holds her own among the three male characters that she shares the story with.

Sam describes her time in middle school, when she first accepted her role as a Valkyrie, as difficult, to say the least. She recalls many times when she was bullied: how her classmates would try to pull her hijab off of her head, and how “they asked me if I was a terrorist” (2015, p. 425). In the second book, *The Hammer of Thor*, Sam and Magnus share a very personal moment as Sam asks Magnus to keep guard as she performs her noon prayers. Riordan allows readers the opportunity to understand these important moments in the Muslim faith, and build an understanding of these people. Riordan was writing this series during a very difficult time for Muslim-identifying people in the United States, given the many stigmas about the religion and those who identify with it in our culture today. Because of past incidences, namely the attacks of 9-11, there is prejudice towards Arab people as some people believe that all Muslim or Arab peoples must be terrorists. This is still relevant now, as we see xenophobic orders like the immigration bans passed through our current government. Riordan addresses this in a way that is able to be understood by readers of any age, and he is able to remove some of the stigma surrounding this group by allowing others to feel empathy for Samira and her experience.

The final character that rounds out the main troupe of characters that we know so far in this series is Alex Fierro. This character, introduced in *The Hammer of Thor*, is one of Riordan's most groundbreaking, as Alex is a type of person not often shown in modern media (and is still trying to be understood by society as a whole). Alex is initially described as clad in pink and green clothing, with hair that is green all over except for the roots which are dark. Initially, from Magnus's perspective, we understand this character to be male. But, when Halfborn Gunderson, one of Magnus's hall mates, addresses Alex as a male, Alex immediately corrects, saying "Call me *she*-unless I tell you otherwise" (2016, p. 51). Magnus is initially confused, but Alex clarifies the situation by saying "I'm gender fluid and transgender, idiot" (2016, p. 54). Although she was born a biological male, Alex identifies as a female most of the time. But her gender identity can change without warning or will. On some days, she feels very much like a she, and on other days or in certain moments, she feels more like a he. Gender fluidity is something that is difficult to understand in many ways, and is also very different for each person. Magnus tries to understand and acts as a good example for readers in this instance as he asks thoughtful questions, not ones that are blaming or pointed, but ones that show that he truly wants to understand Alex as a person. Alex does answer the questions, not without a little malice, as is in her nature, but makes sure Magnus understands that she is not a "poster child" for gender fluidity (2016, p. 272).

Riordan, through Alex's voice, explains her gender identity in a way that makes it easy for any reader to understand, and allows the audience to sympathize with Alex through Magnus. Magnus asks many questions throughout the book, about not only Alex's changing gender, but also how her gender fluidity affects her ability to shapeshift. Magnus also questions Sam as someone who is religious, and who is a daughter of Loki like Alex, about her level of comfort with Alex's gender identity. Sam explains that it does not particularly bother her, and that she

has more important things to be concerned about that are not Alex's gender, like the impending Doomsday, for example. Riordan educates his readers about gender fluid and transgender individuals, and also gives them a point of reference through Magnus in order for them to learn how to ask questions and understand people they might otherwise have a hard time understanding. Riordan is not only representing this population of people and allowing those who identify to feel comfortable, but he is also teaching his readers how to be understanding and empathetic in many ways. Alex is a character that I am interested in watching develop throughout the third, and final, book of the series. I am also interested in the potential romantic relationship between Alex and Magnus that is being foreshadowed by Riordan in the second book of the series. There is a potential here for Riordan to give us a main character who does not identify as heterosexual, as a majority of his main characters have done so far.

As for other characters in the series, the main secondary characters are Magnus's other hallmates. They are Thomas Jefferson Jr., or T.J., who is described as African-American; Halfborn Gunderson and Mallory Keen, who are both assumed white, and are also heterosexual as they begin a relationship with each other. Overall, most of the other background characters range in racial diversity, but we assume most of them are white, especially the gods due to their European heritage. But Riordan is still able to present a vast range of differing manners of diversity, representing different racial, religious, and gender identities, as well as different abilities. In a time in our culture where it can be difficult to find acceptance, Riordan gives his audience a cast of characters that they may identify with and, if they do not, gives them the means to more effectively understand those around them.

The Trials of Apollo

The Trials of Apollo is Riordan's most current series, as it is still in progress and currently has only one book available. The series premiered in the spring of 2016 and once again revisits the Greek gods and mythology, and some familiar faces at Camp Half-Blood. Although this is the third series that takes place in this particular setting and within this mythology, Riordan is able to create a new cast of characters while also highlighting old ones. *The Trials of Apollo* follows the god Apollo, a character that we have met in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, who has been punished by his godly father Zeus for allowing Octavian, one of Apollo's sons, to take advantage of his abilities to see the future. This caused a war in which the gods were embarrassed by their inability to defeat the giants without the help of the demigods from *The Heroes of Olympus*. Zeus, looking for someone to blame, decides to punish Apollo and sends him to earth as a full mortal who has no godly powers, and can even bleed, which is unheard of for a god. Since this series is still new, I have a limited number of characters I am able to analyze in this section².

The series is narrated from the perspective of the newly mortal Apollo, who is given a mortal host by the name of Lester Papadopoulos. From what we can tell from the first book, *The Hidden Oracle*, Lester was not a human boy before this, and his body is created specifically to host Apollo. Lester/Apollo describes his mortal form as having dark, curly hair and blue eyes, and a face "marred by a swollen, eggplant-colored nose" (2016, p. 21). Again, we assume that this form that Apollo takes is white because it is not otherwise specified. In this description as well, we see Apollo come to terms with his body as a sixteen-year-old male. Since Apollo has always been able to control his form as a god, having a body of an average human being is

² The newest installment of this series, *The Dark Prophecy*, was released on May 2, 2017 after the completion of this research. Therefore, the characters introduced in that novel were not reflected in this paper.

jarring for him. He even calls his new body “fat” because of its lack of “eight-pack abs,” but he is corrected by his companion Meg McCaffrey, who states that his body is “average” (2016, p. 22). Body image is something that teenagers of all genders struggle with constantly, and seeing a character, although a former god, struggle with that can be consoling to some. This is also different for Riordan, because most of Riordan's other protagonists are described as muscular or lean, usually because they are warriors who train often in order to protect themselves. But allowing readers to meet a character who has a body shape similar to Lester's and also have similar struggles accepting this form allows them to connect with Lester. They get to understand that even gods have problems accepting their own bodies, but, throughout the rest of the book, we are able to see Apollo/Lester find his own strengths and abilities with the body he has. Ultimately he finds a relationship with the form he now has.

The major factor in Apollo's addition to diversity in the series comes from his sexual orientation. It is mentioned many times throughout the novel that Apollo has had two great loves in his lifetime as a god, one of whom was female (Daphne) and the other male (Hyacinthus). Through a series of flashbacks, we are able to understand Apollo's connection with each of these two, and understand that both were passionate romances. Through his narration, Apollo also explains how many of the Greek gods had partners of both genders, and how he personally has had “thirty-three mortal girlfriends and eleven mortal boyfriends” (2016, p. 94). Although it is never stated specifically that Apollo is bisexual, we can gather from this information that in fact he is. The representation of a bisexual character is important in modern culture, because, even though bisexuality has been present since ancient cultures, much like gender fluidity in Norse culture, there is still a misunderstanding in our society about those who identify as bisexual. There is often a notion that those who are bisexual cannot make up their minds as to whether or

not they may actually be gay, or that they are more promiscuous than those who do not identify as bisexual. Neither of these beliefs is necessarily true, and Riordan showcasing a bisexual character is an important step forward in the understanding of this group.

Overall, Riordan's other characters in this series do not dramatically add to the diversity of the series as a whole. Riordan does give us the first homosexual relationship in his series by continuing to develop the blossoming relationship between Nico di Angelo and Will Solace that was teased at the end of *The Heroes of Olympus*. Riordan also seems to focus more on his background characters and their racial identities as well in this series. He is able to diversify his cast by describing in more detail the campers around Apollo, which gives us a better understanding of the makeup of the camp.

The series as a whole has room for growth, especially since this is the first book of a planned five in the series. Riordan is also planning on revisiting some of his past characters in this series as we see a brief appearance by Percy and, at the end of the novel, see Leo and Calypso return to embark on the quest with Apollo. Although the diversity is limited now, the potential for growth over five books is noteworthy and I hope to see Riordan capitalize on this opportunity.

Conclusion

In the course of twelve years and seventeen books, author Rick Riordan has been able to introduce his audience to multitudes of characters of varying races, genders, sexualities, and ages, allowing them to learn about lifestyles unlike their own, or relate to characters that are living in situations similar to theirs. Even though he began his fantasy writing career with a cast of characters that were mostly white and heterosexual, he has diversified his cast of characters

exponentially, and also grown in the type of diversity he was featuring in his characters. By including more characters of different gender identities, abilities, and religious orientations, he further expands the kind of people that can relate to and appreciate his stories. One of the most important aspects of his representation of these minorities is that their identities do not limit their involvement in the plot. Although Riordan focuses on their differences and how those affect their lives, never do they inhibit the characters from being involved in pivotal moments of the story. Riordan does not seem to introduce his characters solely because they are different, or to meet a diversity quota of any kind, but purely because he wants to represent as many kinds of people as possible in his stories. Riordan even states that his goal is always to present “a variety of relatable, positive role models in my books” (Riordan, 2017). He demonstrates that he is aware of the differences in his characters, but does not want to tokenize them, or make them important because of their minority status.

The perspective demonstrated by Riordan is exemplary and something many writers, of all media, can learn from. Riordan is an author who is acutely aware of the cultural climate, and the degree to which identity affects middle grade students. In a National Public Radio interview, he states that “often they’re trapped, trying to identify where they fit in their culture” (2012). By creating characters the way that he does, Riordan allows for this middle grade audience in particular to feel accepted and even allows them to understand themselves more through the fantastical adventures of his characters. Riordan’s books are continuously popular, and, because of this popularity, Riordan has been given a platform most writers covet. He is able to reach a mass audience, and, through his characters, teach this audience about topics important to him. In 2018, Riordan will be working with his current publisher Disney Publishing Worldwide to release three new books through his imprint Rick Riordan Presents. This imprint will feature

mythology-based works by three authors who are from the cultures (Hindu, Native American, and Chinese) they choose to write about (Riordan, 2017). By giving the voice of these groups over to these authors, Riordan allows for a more diverse reading selection and an opportunity for readers to learn valuable information about cultures unlike their own. This imprint is further proof of Riordan's desire to feature a variety of people and cultures in the stories he shares. Even if he is not writing the stories, the goal is still to make available the stories of different cultures and represent those who are currently underrepresented.

Riordan's writing career has been wildly successful thus far, with a promising future ahead. He has new books slated for release in the next year, which are continuations of his current two series, and, with the release of the imprint, Riordan will be establishing himself as one of the premier voices for mythological fantasy in the juvenile fiction world. Because of his success, Riordan can continue to tell poignant stories about a variety of teenagers finding their place in the world as they know it. By portraying their specific struggles and successes, Riordan proves that "every child can be a hero" (Riordan, 2017), regardless of where they are from, who they are, or how they may identify. Overall, Riordan is intentional in his use of diversity and creates a welcoming, accepting universe for readers of all ages to call their own.

References

National Conferences of State Legislatures (2016, April 4). Homeless and runaway youth.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx>

National Public Radio. (2012, December 19). In 'red pyramid,' kid heroes take on ancient Egypt.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.npr.org/2012/12/19/167547891/in-red-pyramid-kid-heroes-take-on-ancient-egypt>

Riordan, R. (2005). *The lightning thief*. (Percy jackson and the olympians book 1). New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Riordan, R. (2006). *The sea of monsters*. (Percy jackson and the olympians book 2). New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Riordan, R. (2007). *The titan's curse*. (Percy jackson and the olympians book 3). New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Riordan, R. (2008). *The battle of the labyrinth*. (Percy jackson and the olympians book 4). New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2009). *The last olympian*. (Percy jackson and the olympians book 5). New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2010). *The red pyramid*. (The kane chronicles book 1). New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2010). *The lost hero*. (The heroes of olympus book 1). New York, NY: Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2011). *The throne of fire* (The kane chronicles book 2). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2011). *The son of neptune*. (The heroes of olympus book 2). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2012). *The serpent's shadow*. (The kane chronicles book 3). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2012). *The mark of athena*. (The heroes of olympus book 3). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2013). *The house of hades*. (The heroes of olympus book 4). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2014). *The blood of olympus*. (The heroes of olympus book 5). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion Books.

Riordan, R. (2015). *The sword of summer*. (Magnus chase and the gods of asgard book 1). New

York, NY: Disney-Hyperion.

Riordan, R. (2016). *The hammer of thor*. (Magnus chase and the gods of asgard book 2). New

York, NY: Disney-Hyperion.

Riordan, R. (2016). *The hidden oracle*. (The trials of apollo book 1). New York, NY:

Disney-Hyperion.

Riordan, R. (2017). An interview with Rick. Retrieved from

<http://rickriordan.com/about/an-interview-with-rick/>

Riordan, R. (2017). Frequently asked questions. Retrieved from

<http://rickriordan.com/about/frequently-asked-questions/>

Riordan, R. (2017, April 26). Rick Riordan presents. [Weblog post] Retrieved from

<http://rickriordan.com/2017/04/rick-riordan-presents/>